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Review of *Relief Sculpture*, by L. R. Rogers

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NIKI STAVROLAKES

Aegean Institute

Relief Sculpture

by L. R. ROGERS. 229 pages, 112 photographs, 30 text figures. OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, New York 1974 (The Appreciation of the Arts; General Editor: Harold Osborne) \$19.50

To discuss relief without, or almost entirely without, reference to its content, concentrating exclusively on its form, seems a difficult task, yet the author has accomplished it masterly. His aim is to make us aware of relief in terms of its technique, depiction of space, composition, contour, relationship to the background, use of line or of light and shadow; in brief, all those elements of a work of art which are intrinsic parts of its successfulness, yet are usually the most difficult to notice because their impact is global and our perception of it almost subconscious.

Rogers speaks of Relief with a capital R. He ranges widely in time and space, size and medium, taking in all cultures and using few specific examples but striving to define general principles which can then be applied to individual cases by the enlightened reader. Therefore the archaeologist will find little in it which is meant specifically for him; yet the entire book will sharpen anybody's eye and understanding of this form of art.

Because of its very nature, relief partakes of both sculpture in the round and painting. It lives a life of make-believe, being on the one hand too plastic to be entirely pictorial and too closely tied to a background to be entirely three-dimensional. We all realize that this ambiguity exists, but the author has now put it into clear words, analyzing exactly why and how certain effects are produced and supplying very useful terminology. He abstains from qualifying judgments; each form examined is not better or worse than another, only different, and producing different results. But this very objectivity adds to the value of the work,

which I have found thoroughly enjoyable and instructive. Particularly illuminating are the comments on Mexican and Indian reliefs which, because they are outside Western tradition, embody principles and forms alien to our general experience. Equally perceptive is the formal analysis of some Gothic and Romanesque sculpture. Whenever specific comparisons are made between two or more reliefs, the selection is especially apt and accompanied by usually excellent photographs. Schematic line drawings in the margins help illustrate perceptual theories.

Some generalizations on Greek relief are perhaps too sweeping to be completely accurate, but then so are all generalizations. The relief from the Nike Balustrade on page 144 should not be dated "early 5th century B.C." Otherwise, there is little I could object to, and much I can approve of, especially the last chapter on contemporary, non-representational relief. Any student of ancient (and later) art will undoubtedly profit from reading this book, and even the most scientifically oriented archaeologist will be able to respond to its factual and systematic approach.

BRUNILDE SISMONDO RIDGWAY

Bryn Mawr College

The Archaeology of Ships

by PAUL JOHNSTONE. 135 pages, frontispiece, 13 color photographs, 31 black and white photographs, 25 text figures, 2 maps. HENRY Z. WALCK, New York 1974 (A Walck Archaeology; Editor: Magnus Magnusson) \$8.95

This recent book on a subject experiencing fast-growing popularity appeals to readers of all ages. The New York Academy of Sciences awarded an Honorable Mention to the series of Walck Archaeologies edited by M. Magnusson as outstanding at the Third Annual Science Book Award Program. The subject, as accurately described in the title, is intelligently and entertainingly presented by Paul Johnstone, who heads BBC T.V.'s History and Archaeology unit.

Each of the ten chapters treats one specific ship excavation, including archaeological as well as anecdotal information and providing the essence of each site and the work done there within a perspective view of the whole history of underwater archaeology and excavation



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